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MISSION TO METROPOLIS

A TOTAL STRATEGY

Occasional Paper No. 7
on Christian Faith
and Industrial Society

BY
HUGH C. WHITE, JR.
ROBERT C. BATCHELDER

A COMMENT

Men and women in every nation and every church are searching in an unprecedented way to find how to serve as Christians and to fulfil Christ's ministry to the world in their own lives. No church is satisfied with its response; all our churches alike must face this search together.

. . . every church (must) begin at once a radical study of its own obedience to mission. Included in this should be a study of its structures, of its theology of mission, and of its priorities in decision. We need to ask whether our structures are appropriate to our world and the church as it is, and if not, how they should be changed.

It will mean radical change in our priorities -- It means the death of old isolations and inherited attitudes. It means a willingness to forego many desirable things, in every church.*

*Anglican Congress, August, 1963, "Mutual Responsibility and Interdependence in the Body of Christ"

This paper is a serious attempt to meet the growing demand in the churches to formulate a strategy for action. It is a "position paper" for the purpose of encouraging action NOW. The quotes above could be excerpted from the resolutions of any one of the major denominations in the United States or from the various study reports and resolutions of the World Council of Churches.

The authors of this report would appreciate your personal appraisal of the position taken in this paper.

The Reverend Hugh C. White, Jr. is Executive Director of the Detroit Industrial Mission, chaplain to the Episcopal bishop of Michigan, and editor of a recent book, CHRISTIANS IN A TECHNOLOGICAL ERA (Seabury Press).

The Reverend Robert C. Batchelder is Associate Director of the Detroit Industrial Mission, minister in the United Church of Christ, and author of THE IRREVERSIBLE DECISION: 1939-1950 (Houghton-Mifflin).

Copies of this Occasional Paper No. 7 may be obtained by writing the Reverend Robert C. Batchelder, Detroit Industrial Mission, 7109 West McNichols, Detroit, Michigan 48221.

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COVER PICTURE IS AN AERIAL VIEW OF THE CITY OF DETROIT.
COURTESY OF CITY OF DETROIT REPORT AND INFORMATION COMMITTEE.

MISSION TO METROPOLIS

A TOTAL STRATEGY

We in the United States are essentially an urban people. In spite of the vast spaces available in a nation that spans a continent, three-quarters of all Americans are crowded together into cities and their expanding suburbs. Even those who still live on farms do not escape the impact of urbanization. The quality of life of the American farmer is radically different today because of the standards of value, the ways of thinking and behaving, the media of information and entertainment -- not to metion the multitude of mass-produced goods and services -- that emanate from the city.

What should be the response of the Christian church to the basic fact that we live in a society that is urban -- and is moving rapidly toward total urbanization and total industrialization? On the face of it, one would expect that such a rapid and radical transformation of society should call forth a comparable transformation -- or at least substantial modification -- in the church's strategy. Indeed there are signs that the church has become aware of this new reality as something meriting special attention -- even as a challenge demanding some innovation in its strategy of mission. A department concerned with "The Urban Church" has been a standard fixture at denominational headquarters for some time. More recently, urbanization has reached the status of an "emphasis" for certain denominations. The Episcopal Church has sponsored a series of "Metabagdad" conferences as part of an intensive program of awakening its bishops and clergy to a new understanding of the issues confronting the church in a metropolitan center. The United Church of Christ has borrowed Rev. Don Benedict from the Chicago City Missionary Society to help launch its two-year denomination emphasis on the church and urbanization.

During the decade and a half since the founding of East Harlem Protestant parish, prophetic voices -- and action -- in "inner-city" churches have helped at least the leaders of our denominations to focus with a fresh sense of urgency upon new spheres of urban ministry beyond the traditional concerns of the average city church. Slum housing conditions, narcotics addiction, police brutality and corruption, delinquency and gang warefare among youth, problems of poverty and welfare, the civil rights struggle, and even community organization for effective political action -- to name such issues is to name areas where human life is at stake in the city, areas where the church at her best has begun to develop new thrusts of witness and service to express the reconciling mission of her Lord.

The purpose of this article is to support and encourage this heightened concern for mission appropriate to the new realities of the metropolis -- but also to point out a conspicuous omission in much current talk about this task. Clearly business, industrial corporations and labor are major powers within the metropolis. They provide the economic lifeblood that supports the fabric of the entire community. Yet in all the promotional literature about the "the church and urbanization," in all the calls for the church to develop "bold new forms of mission relevant to the main issues of

331911

life within the metropolis," rarely is there any but a passing reference to these dominant institutions of the economic realm.

It would be quite possible for us to enjoy this brief "emphasis" on "The Urban Church" and then pass on next year to the next emphasis. We can leave the inner-city churches to carry on with renewed vigor their "urban work" while the rest of us turn our attention to liturgical reform, or perhaps to "the church and leisure." And this is precisely what will happen unless we move beyond a vision of the city as a cluster of residential neighborhoods, each with parish churches to serve the needs of people who live there. If our recognition that our society is basically urban is to lead to a total metropolitan strategy of mission involving the whole church (and not just the inner-city parishes), we must achieve a vision of the city that includes its highly-organized structures and institutions: governmental, educational and -- not least -- economic and industrial. A strategy of mission that ignores these crucial powers within the metropolis can only be superficial. Only the recognition of the structural realities of the metropolis will allow us to develop a strategy of mission that takes the metropolis seriously and is able to carry out a ministry relevant to the whole life of an urban people.

We propose to outline below the scope of such a total strategy of urban mission. Let us begin by examining briefly the nature of industrialization and its relation to the metropolis.

I. INDUSTRIALIZATION AND URBANIZATION

The process of industrialization has been, during the past century, the dominant force shaping the urban culture in which we Americans now live. It has created our basic standard of living, changed the landscape of our nation, transformed our people from farmers into factory workers, clerks, technicians and managers. It mass-produced the automobile -- which in itself has altered the shape of our cities and changed the way of life of the nation.

Not only has this double process of industralization-urbanization created the world we now live in; this is a continuing process which constitutes the dynamic for change within our society -- and therefore will exert profound influence in shaping the quality of the world we live in tomorrow. (This is true not only within the United States, but around the world: the drive to industrialize is having a revolutionary impact upon every under-developed nation.)

There is an intimate and complex interrelation between the process of industrialization and the process of urbanization. To begin with, industrialization has created the city as we know it. It is true that for thousands of years cities have existed as centers of government and trade -- yet the rapid multiplication of cities, and their burgeoning into the sprawling metropolis have come under the spur of the industrial revolution. The presence of factories with their demand for labor led to a flood of immigration from Europe to America, from South to North, from country to city -- people leaving the old ways of agriculture and seeking the economic opportunity offered by industry. The resulting concentration of population created new markets which then attracted new manufacturing and service industries -- and so towns grew into cities and cities have expanded into vast metropolitan areas.

The economic necessities of early industrialization have left visible marks upon the geography of our cities: their location near sources of power or raw material or transportation; neighborhood patterns of manufacturing, commerce, and housing; the tracts of cheap frame houses and tenements, originally erected to house workers,

which have now degenerated into our present-day slums.

As cities matured, the service industries grew to serve the factories and their community, and the characteristic institutions of urban life developed: the utilities, advertising and retail networks, the mass media of communication, centers of banking, finance and insurance, the bureaucracies of municipal government, public school systems, universities, research centers, great hospitals and welfare agencies. Originally these structures were largely controlled by the same men who controlled manufacturing industry; in recent decades they have come to have a certain autonomy from primary industry. They feel the impact of decisions made by industry -- but they also have their own independent power to influcence the structures of industry. Decisions made by an urban renewal agency, the development of a new line of research in a university, the decay of a great public school system, the changing of a tax structure by city council or state legislature -- all these have a profound effect not only upon industry, but upon the whole shape and quality of human life in the metropolis. Nevertheless, the vigor and profitability of industrial and business corporations remain crucial to the health of any urban society: witness what happens to the total community when an industry declines from boom to recession, or when a lag in technological development causes a basic industry to lose its competitive advantage to some other region. In the pluralism of structures and institutions that shape the metropolis, mutually influencing one another and creating the ethos within which human life grows, the economic structures of business, industry and labor are certainly among the most important. If the church really means to take the metropolis seriously and to develop her mission to the whole of urban life, she must discover effective means of engagement with these economic structures and the men who operate within them.

II. THE STYLE OF INDUSTRIALIZATION

Thus far we have been speaking of the impact of industrialization upon the city through its unit of economic production, the manufacturing corporation. But industrialization is fundamental to urbanization in another broader sense: it provides the "style" of thinking and operation not only for institutions of economic enterprise, but for every major activity and institution in our urban society. Industrialization in this broader sense is not restricted to organizing machines for efficient mass production. It is an industrialized society's method of organizing any large scale human activity with or without machines -- and is as useful in running a hospital or a big law firm as it is running an assembly line. This style of industrialization provides the ethos of operation for our society. It involves three major characteristics: (1) reliance upon science and technology, (2) rationalized organization, (3) the pragmatic spirit.

1. Industrialization self - consciously utilizes the fruits of the scientific method and rigorously applies technology in a search for ever-increasing efficiency in equipment and operation. Research and innovation become continuous parts of doing business.

2. Industrialization means a radically new method of organizing people in large numbers to accomplish complex tasks. This organizational revolution is based upon (a) division of labor (b) specialization and (c) hierarchical and rationalized structure. Symbolized by the assembly line of the manufacturing corporation, it has become the typical method of human organization in running everything from a battleship to a university. It is dependent upon the develop-

ment of a group of professional managers who do not share the technical competence of those they direct, but who are skilled in the maintenance and development of an organization. Their managerial ability permits the activity of many people of diverse skills -- each doing something different -- to be coordinated in such a way that the organization accomplishes a task that none could accomplish alone.

3. Industrialization also involves a pragmatic spirit: seeking efficiency as an end in itself, a concern for "what works," for "results," for "business-like methods," and "getting the job done." Two major contributions of the pragmatic approach are the planning process and the universal use of cost accounting as a precise means of judging results.

It is fruitless to argue about the historical sources of these elements in the style of industrialization -- whether technology is the offspring of industry or of the scientific spirit, whether the pragmatic spirit has its deepest roots in industry, or the American frontier, or the writings of Peirce and James. It is enough to recognize the fact that this unique combination of technology, organization and pragmatism has reached its epitome in American industry -- and has become the typical mode of operating and thinking in the dominant institutions of American life. Government, the public schools, universities, philanthropic foundations, welfare agencies, television networks, foodstore chains, the police department, not to mention corporations and labor unions -- each of these institutions is concerned for a different aspect of metropolitan life, but each approaches its task and carries out its function according to the style of industrialization.

There are indeed some persons in American society who are not deeply emersed in the style of industrialization. The ministry of the church must include a concern for them. But if the church is to respond to the full challenge of our urbanized culture, its mission must not remain on the periphery but must move into the mainstream. This means that the church must devise new structures and techniques for engaging those men whose primary sphere of living and deciding is the large organization rather than the residential neighborhood. But it is not merely a matter of structure and technique; it is a matter of theology and communication. The church must rethink its message and discover how to express it in the language and thought forms of persons whose habitual way of thinking and behaving is characterized by technological know-how, organizational skill and a pragmatic spirit.

III. STRATEGY FOR THE CHURCH

An effective over-all strategy of mission in our new urbanized-industrialized society will require the church to reshape its ministry on at least three levels: (1) the local congregation, (2) specialized ministries in the dominant structures of the metropolis, (3) centers for study and research.

The Ministry of the Local Congregation.

The ministry of the parish church needs to be reshaped in the light of the city and its structure. Worship and sacrament, preaching and teaching, prayer and fellowship -- these are essential, but performing them in the traditional manner is not. The essential elements of the local church's ministry must be carried out in a new stance. First of all, the ministry needs to be turned inside out so that it is directed not so much toward itself as toward the world. In spite of all that has been written and preached about the church and the world, the practice of the overwhelming

majority of parishes still proclaims that the local church is the place for Christians to come to -- to receive the ministry of the church. We must create new patterns of congregational life that proclaim the opposite, namely that the local church is a place from which Christians go out -- to perform the ministry of the church in the world.

Once this fundamental revolution takes place, the local congregation will be able to look at its own structure in relation to the structure of the metropolis and the needs of its people. Many churches in the inner areas of the metropolis will recognize that they no longer constitute a parish in the traditional geographical sense -- for their members are scattered across the city and its suburbs. A concern for human needs in the world will frequently mean that such a local church will take its immediate neighborhood much more seriously, as has been demonstrated by those churches who have resisted the temptation to flee to the suburbs and are struggling to discover a faithful ministry in the midst of urban change.

On the other hand, many suburban churches are geographical parishes in the sense that they draw their entire membership from a restricted residential area -- what Gibson Winter calls a "residential enclave." For such a church, seeking to carry out Christ's ministry in the world will probably mean taking its local geographical neighborhood much less seriously. Its vision of "responsibility in our community" will expand to include the needs of the total metropolitan area including the central city -- where, indeed, many of the members of such a church already exercise their daily vocational responsibility.

A local congregation seeking to fulfill its ministry in the world will discover that knowledge of organizations and sensitivity to their workings and problems are important for two reasons. The first is that when the congregation as a corporate body attempts to take concrete action on a specific human need in the world it will immediately come into contact with other corporate structures of the metropolis. Efforts to help rebellious and delinquent youth will require dealings with the police department, with the courts and parole officers, with the local school and the city's youth bureau. Active concern to meet the needs of the hard-core unemployed will bring a congregation into cooperation with (or tension with) the state employment office, the board of education, labor unions and corporations. A local congregation that thinks only in terms of individuals and ignores the reality and power of structures will be severely hampered in its efforts to carry out a ministry of service.

Knowledge of industrialized institutions is important for the local congregation for a second reason, namely the "ministry of the laity." A primary task of the local congregation is to inspire and train its members to carry out the ministry of Christ in their places of worldly responsibility. But the places where most of the men of the congregation serve are primarily within the economic structures of business, industry and labor. A local church can help its members discover what their ministry means in that context only if it has some knowledge of corporate ethos and issues.

In short, the ministry of the local congregation -- no less important than before -- must be substantially reshaped to fit the realities of the urban milieu in which it now exists. This will mean the fundamental stance facing outward toward the world rather than inward toward itself, a concern for the whole metropolis, a knowledge of specific corporate structures and

their peculiar problems, and a radical emphasis upon the ministry of the laity.

Specialized Ministries to Corporate Structures.

Much thinking about "the urban church" stops at this point -- as does most of the money spent by denominations for "urban church projects." Yet there are compelling reasons why the church in an urban-industrial culture must commit its money, men, energy, and creative thought to a strategy that goes beyond the admittedly essential task of revitalizing the parish church. The need is for new and specialized forms of ministry to and within the major structures and institutions of urban society.

The major problems and issues within the metropolis -- the places where human justice and dignity are at stake, where men's lives are to a large extent being made or broken, where the quality of our common life is being molded -- are issues in the public realm that transcend the boundaries of the residential neighborhood where the parish church tends to focus its efforts. Automation, unemployment, retraining, welfare and relief, the changing requirements for education, research and development, urban renewal, metropolitan planning -- these issues will not be solved by men in their capacity as private citizens or volunteers for local community activity. Rather men will deal with these issues through their institutional roles as members and officials of labor unions, corporations, city governments, universities, police departments, and political organizations. If the church is serious in its efforts to influence for good the fabric of the metropolitan areas, it must develop appropriate instruments of mission that can deal with these institutions and structures on their own ground, in their own language, and with intimate knowledge of how things look from their perspective.

Thirty years ago the American labor movement was faced with a similar problem of developing new forms appropriate for the world in which it existed. Divided along traditional craft lines (plumbers, carpenters, electricians), unions found themselves impotent in their efforts to achieve a modicum of justice at the hands of powerful corporations in automobile and steel. The companies divided and conquered, playing one weak union off against another. The traditional structure of labor -- the craft union -- was inadequate for the task. Then in the 1930's a new form emerged: the industrial-type union of the CIO organized all workers in a given plant (regardless of their skill) into one strong union. This new structure gave labor a powerful weapon that enabled it to deal with the companies more or less on equal terms -- and collective bargaining rapidly became an established part of the fabric of industry. Factories today are better places to work because of this creation of a new and more fitting form of labor organization.

Just as it was true for the craft union, so it is true for the local parish church that there are certain built-in limitations that make it an inappropriate instrument for dealing with large and powerful corporate structures. Typically its building is located in a residential neighborhood; it tends therefore to focus its concern on issues relating to families, women, and children. Demands of the parish organization and traditional expectations on the part of the congregation consume the time and energy of the clergy; this makes it very difficult for parish leadership to become intimately familiar with the language, ethos, and specialized issues characterizing even one corporation -- and of course the laity from one parish are scattered throughout many corporations. The fact that a local congregation re-

presents one particular denomination also raises a barrier that impedes its building relationships with corporate structures in the public realm.

For these and other reasons it is necessary to supplement the church in its traditional form -- the local parish -- with new forms of outreach that are appropriately shaped to engage men in the context of the new structures and institutions that dominate the urban scene. The concept of developing specialized structures of ministry for specific institutions is not new for the church. The church has discovered that its concern for the university community can rarely be fully expressed through a local parish, even if physically located directly across the street from the center of the campus. The town vs. gown social barrier is in most cases too stubborn to be overcome by the local congregation, which finds itself unable to deal relevantly with the issues and concerns that are vital to students and faculty on the academic campus. Therefore a variety of forms of specialized campus ministry have sprung up to carry out the mission of the church within the university. In the same way, specialized chaplaincies in hospitals and prisons express the concern of the church for people in these institutions in a way that parish churches are simply not structured to do.

What is now needed is to expand this insight and strategy, going beyond those institutions where persons are preparing for life (university) or are temporarily removed from normal pursuits (hospital or jail). The church must also learn how to engage people where they are at the prime of their strength and in the mainstream of the activities, struggles, and accomplishments of life. This means specialized ministries to each major institution in the city: industrial mission within industry, engagement (as yet unnamed) with key governmental agencies, involvement in civil rights organizations.

Although our society as a whole can fairly be called "industrialized," not every city is "industrialized" in the sense of being a center for manufacturing. Pittsburgh is dominated by steel, and Detroit by automobiles -- but Boston has finance and insurance in addition to the electronics industry -- and the dominant industry in Washington is of course the Federal Government. Other cities like New York have many important centers of influence. The strategy for the church is to be intimately involved in whatever are the dominant structures that shape an urban community and give it its distinctive character, whether these be manufacturing, finance, government, or something else. In whatever form these new ministries develop -- and there is need for a great variety of experimentation here -- they will involve intimate familiarity with the language and ethos and customs of particular institutions, and a serious and searching conversation with Christian and non-Christian around the central issues with which the community's key institutions are concerned. They will be ecumenical-minded, lay centered, and will involve conscious searching together by clergy and laity to discover the meaning and significance of the Christian faith for human life in these institutions.

Centers for Intensive Study and Research.

The church needs not only many operating agencies of mission, both at the parish level and within major institutions of the metropolis, but also some centers for intensive study, reflection, research, and writing. The primary purpose of such centers will be (a) to understand the nature of the industrialization porcess and the urban culture it has produced; (b) to understand what this process and its accompanying modes of thought and value do to people; and (c) to relate to these realities the understanding of life and humanity as seen in our Christian heritage.

There needs to be a close relationship between such a center for study and the particular agencies of mission. Indeed much of the rethinking of theology and its meaning for men in urban-industrial society can only be done by those actually engaged in frontier mission work at specific places in the metropolis. Nevertheless there is also a need for study centers somewhat removed from the daily demands of mission operation. Focus of concentration upon the work of thinking and research and writing will provide vital stimulation for creative mission work in parish and in specialized ministry.

Potentially this role could be played by the theological seminary -- yet not even our best seminaries take the contemporary world seriously enough to fulfill this role. A self-imposed isolation makes the vast majority of our seminaries even more separated from intimate knowledge and involvement with corporate structures of the public realm than is the parish church. Therefore the seminary is no less in need of re-orientating and re-shaping than is the parish congregation.

Perhaps this need could best be met by the establishment of an institute for the study of "Christianity in an Urban-Industrial Society" at a location where it could have close functional ties both with a leading seminary and a first-rate secular university. Its role would be that of catalyst-provoker in relation to the seminary, the secular discipline of the university, and particular agencies of mission.

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IV. CONCLUSION

The total strategy of the church in the metropolitan center must be seen not as several isolated or even competing ministires, but as one mission using a variety of methods and tools. Every instrument of mission needs to see the total metropolis as the mission field and the total church as the agent of mission. Metropolitan planning, the racial revolution, needed reforms in education in a time of rapid technological change, the question of unemployment and retraining -- all these are issues which confront the total metropolitan community and are therefore the issues which the total church -- urban and suburban, parochial and specialized -- needs to address itself as a whole.

There must be continuous cooperation and communication between the various agencies of the church's total mission. Parish churches in the suburbs and in the inner city need to communicate with one another, strengthen one another, and share with one another in their respective ministries. Within a given region of the city, churches of different denominations must cooperate together in local ecumenicity if they are to be effective in addressing themselves to the needs of men in their area. There needs further to be cooperation between specialized ministry and parochial ministry. Specialized ministries can contribute much to reforming and enlivening the preaching, teaching, and worship that takes place in the local church. The local church, on the other hand, can contribute much -- if it will -- of theological insight and motivation to men seeking to develop a ministry as laity in the places where they have worldly responsibilities. Parish churches should become seed-beds of men who will develop and participate in specialized ministries within corporate structures. Finally, centers for reflective study and research need to contribute to and receive from the agencies of mission, parochial and specialized.

Our urbanized-industrialized society has become highly structured and pluralistic. Only with a total and diversified strategy of mission -- one that includes vital new ministries to and within corporate structures of industry and government -- can the church hope to fulfill its high calling in the metropolis.

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